

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, April 17, 1996

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Historic Washington St.

(This excerpt is from *Put It On the Front Page, Please!* by John and Bobbie Cutler.)

It was fortunate, too, that Bobbie's mother, Cid Ricketts Sumner, had not yet written her capsule account of Duxbury for "New England Journeys," a special edition of *Ford Times* published in 1954. When Cid brought Duxbury into focus in her article, "Washington Street, Duxbury," the community did not loom as a teeming metropolis with a long line of eager advertisers clamoring for space in a weekly gazette:

It is a quiet village street 2 miles long, but the very essence of New England is here — history, romance, simple beauty, marvelously preserved, first by chance, now by careful design. For it was to Duxbury, Massachusetts, in about 1622 that the first settlers came from Plymouth to build summer homes and to cultivate their lands, returning in winter to the safety of the stockade.

After describing the colonial architecture that was so accidentally but happily preserved, Cid wrote:

There is only one traffic light in Duxbury, on State Highway 3A. Turn there toward the sea, round the curve

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and you will see the Liberty pole, so named in Revolutionary times. On your right is Blue Fish River where from 1764 to 1857 there was a quarter-mile-long wharf. The townsmen were kept busy during these times, shipping mackerel and cod. Here were launched many of the finest of the sailing vessels built by Ezra Weston...and his sons. The first house on the left contains the Historical Society collection, open to visitors; on the other corner is one known as the Cable Office, because when the first Atlantic cable was laid, coming in on Duxbury Beach, messages were received here.

Crossing Blue Fish River one has a fine view of the marshes, the bay and a glimpse of the outer dunes that form it. Among the stores near the post office is one over which still hangs the old sign "Sweetser's General Store — English and West Indian Goods." Set back of the colonial with an anchor on the lawn are the world-famous Clapp Marine Biological Laboratories, open to visitors. Beyond the Congregational Church (1840) is the historic Winsor House, now run as an inn by a descendant of an early sea captain and shipbuilder of that name. One room is a replica of an English "pub" with rare prints and old muskets.

Move slowly under the arching elms. If you are held up by traffic don't honk. Lean out the window and listen — 2 cars have probably just stopped for conversation or to take in the family dog. It's that sort of village. Look down the short lanes that lead to the water. Many were made by ox teams hauling lumber for the ship building. Now in summer one sees white sails on the blue water.

Just beyond Surplus Street (formerly Poverty Lane) are some of the loveliest of the old houses. Farther along, set back from the road, is a large gray house once the home of Fanny Davenport, the actress. In her old carriage house is a bookshop, a good place to rest and browse.

At the flagpole in South Duxbury one may turn back toward State Highway 3A, passing the graveyard where Myles Standish is buried, or go on by the Country Way to Plymouth.